



## UNIVERSAL JURISDICTION UPDATES

(January 2024 – March 2024)

### January

1. On 16 January, the French Supreme Court [confirmed the charge](#) of complicity in crimes against humanity against Lafarge, a French cement manufacturer. Between 2012-2014, Lafarge allegedly enlisted several armed groups in Syria – including the Islamic State – to keep its factory running during the Syrian Civil War, paying them up to 13 million euros.
2. On 22 January, a [Hague district court convicted](#) Mustafa A., a former member of a Syrian pro-government armed group, for war crimes, crimes against humanity, including complicity in torture, inhumane treatment and illegal arrest, and membership in a criminal organization. He was sentenced to 12 years in prison. According to the verdict, Mustafa A. was involved in the 2012 arrest of a man in Syria, and later “handed [him] over to Syrian Air Force intelligence officials who ran a prison where he was tortured”.
3. On 29 January, the AFP reported that a [Syrian man was detained](#) on charges of allegedly committing war crimes and crimes against humanity between 2011-2016 in Syria. He is suspected of belonging to a militia close to the Bashar al-Assad regime and violently suppressing opposition movements.
4. On 30 January, [the UK police arrested a man](#) in Gateshead as part of a broader investigation into genocide and crimes against humanity committed in Rwanda 30 years ago. He was questioned about the 1994 Rwandan genocide against the Tutsi.
5. On 31 January, the Finnish Turku Court of Appeal [dismissed war crimes charges](#) against Gibril Massaquoi, a former leader of a Sierra Leonean rebel group that participated in both the Liberian and Sierra Leonean civil wars between 1999-2003. Massaquoi was accused of ordering the murder, torture, and mutilation of civilians during his time as one of the leaders of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). The Turku Court ruled that it cannot rely on the statements of interviewed witnesses to link the defendant to the acts mentioned, and thus acquitted Massaquoi of all charges.

### February

6. On 3 February, the General Public Prosecutor’s Office in Portugal [convicted an Iraqi national](#), A.A, of war crimes committed in Mosul, Iraq, for the kidnapping and whipping of an Iraqi citizen. This marks Portugal’s first conviction of a perpetrator on charges of war crimes, and based on universal jurisdiction. The Iraqi judiciary and the UN Investigative Team to promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da’esh/ISIL (UNITAD) supported the prosecution.

7. On 15 February, [a Rwandan man was arrested](#) in the Netherlands on alleged charges related to the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. He is suspected of complicity in genocide, incitement to commit genocide, and the war crimes of plunder and destruction of property. The Rwandan authorities reportedly issued an international arrest warrant in 2014 and requested extradition. However, Dutch media reports that he will be prosecuted in a European country due to his Dutch nationality.
8. On 28 February, the Paris Court of Appeal [confirmed the indictment of Roger Lumbula Tshitenga](#) for complicity in crimes against humanity. He is a former rebel leader and was backed by Uganda during the Congolese Civil War (1998-2002). He is accused of committing multiple crimes in the Democratic Republic of Congo between 2001-2002, including murder, torture, rape, pillage, and enslavement – including sexual slavery.

## March

9. On 7 March, the trial of Ousman Sonko (former Minister of Interior of The Gambia) in Switzerland [concluded closing arguments](#) and adjourned for deliberations. The prosecutor asserted Ousman Sonko's responsibility for each charge, including multiple murders, rapes, and acts of torture and called for life imprisonment given his alleged participation in several serious counts of crimes against humanity in The Gambia between 2000-2016. The defence concluded that Ousman Sonko should be acquitted of all charges, and all civil claims should be dismissed.
10. On 11 March, the Swiss Office of the Attorney General [indicted former Syrian Vice-President Rifaat Al-Assad](#) for war crimes and crimes against humanity. The charges include allegedly ordering homicides, acts of torture, cruel treatments, and illegal detentions during the February 1982 massacre in Hama, Syria. At the time, Rifaat Al-Assad was the head of Operations in Hama, commander of the defence brigades, and Vice-President of Syria.
11. On 27 March, a French Court [shortened the sentence](#) of former Liberian rebel commander Kunti Kamara to 30 years in prison. He was a regional commander of the United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO), which fought the ex-President Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front. Kunti Kamara was previously sentenced to life imprisonment during his first trial in Paris in 2022, where he was convicted for "acts of torture and inhuman barbarity" against civilians between 1993 and 1994. He was also found guilty of complicity in crimes against humanity.